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*More than 6,000 people have queued for the 20 seats in a courtroom public gallery in Japan to see a famous singer and actress go on trial. Noriko Sakai has pleaded guilty to using and possessing illegal drugs. Roland Buerk reports:*

When she sang and acted, Noriko Sakai **could always draw a crowd** but rarely as big as the one that **turned up to witness her downfall**. 6,615 people queued, some all night in pouring rain, to get into the courtroom in Tokyo. Officials set up tents and handed out numbered armbands before holding a lottery draw to decide who would get the 20 seats in the public gallery.

When the hearing began the 38-year-old **pleaded guilty** to possessing 0.008 of a gram of what's been described as stimulant drugs, and using drugs too.

Noriko Sakai has been famous since she was a teenager, first as a **J-pop** singer, later as an actress. But her **girl next door** image was shattered in August when her husband was arrested over a drugs offence. She **went on the run** for several days before **turning herself in**. In the meantime the police have found more drugs in her flat.

In court, Noriko Sakai said she wanted a divorce and **to make a fresh start**, studying **nursing care** for the elderly. Her lawyers **pleaded for leniency**. The prosecution is seeking an 18-month prison sentence.

Roland Buerk, BBC News, Tokyo

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>could always draw a crowd</b>	was popular enough to be sure that her performances as a singer or actor would always attract a lot of attention (from her fans, the press etc.)
<b>turned up to witness her downfall</b>	came/arrived to see her failure
<b>pleaded guilty</b>	publicly declared in court that she was responsible for her wrongdoing
<b>J-pop</b>	short for Japanese pop, a style of music that began in the 1990s and has its origins in 1960s music, such as The Beatles
<b>girl next door</b>	someone who is sweet, wholesome, modest and easy-going and seen as very feminine in the traditional way
<b>went on the run</b>	disappeared, was hiding (usually to be <b>on the run</b> means to be hiding from the police or authorities)
<b>turning herself in</b>	coming to the police
<b>to make a fresh start</b>	to begin living her life differently
<b>nursing care</b>	when someone is professionally trained to look after sick, elderly or disabled people and does it as their job
<b>pleaded for leniency</b>	asked for a less severe punishment; asked to show mercy

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